

ADDRESSING DIFFICULT BACKGROUNDS AND EMPLOYMENT BARRIERS

Addressing uncomfortable or perceived barriers can be difficult when job searching, interviewing, and securing a position. Below is a three-pronged approach to facing this proactively.

Proactive Approach

Attitude	Presentation	Explanation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Believe in yourself. What you believe is what you project to others. Show what you have to offer. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sell your strengths. Look the part – dress professionally. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Speak frankly. Keep answers short, concise and focused on the positives.

Addressing Employer Concerns

Employers are not as concerned about gaps in employment or other issues if you can convince them of your value, what you have learned, and what changes you made to overcome and prevent the same issue.

- **Make a list of concerns** an employer might have based on your past choices and actions.
- **For each concern**, describe the steps you have taken/are taking/will take to resolve it.

Eliminating Employer Concerns

There are two ways to eliminate employer concerns:

1. **Resolve it!** If the issue is within your control, take steps to overcome and prevent reoccurrence of the same issue.
 - Once you get started, you can talk to the interviewer about what steps you are taking to resolve the issue. This will make you look honest, self-aware, and proactive.
 - Once the issue is resolved, it is no longer a concern!!
2. **Explain it!** Address the challenge in a letter or in-person. Do not focus on explaining the “situation,” rather focus on why it is no longer a concern.

Addressing the Challenge

Here is the SOLAR approach you can use to address your challenges.

S – Learn a new SKILL

There are a lot of skills you can learn or improve upon to be ready for your next job.

O – Adjust your OUTLOOK

We are often our own worst critic. If your own thinking is holding you back, change it!

L – Change where you LOOK

Sometimes our challenges prevent us from doing the type of work we would like. Are there employers out there who are more likely to hire you? Do you need to research other employment options that will still use your interests, strengths, and skills?

A – Develop a good ANSWER

Some issues can't be resolved, but they can be explained.

R – Access a RESOURCE

Get an item, some information, or a service that will help you move forward! Figure out who offers it, get it, and keep job searching!

The Biggest Concerns

Don't just hope that the employer won't ask or find out. Come up with a strategy to deal with their concerns before they ask. The chart below addresses some of the most common concerns. Ask the Workforce Center staff for help if needed.

Concern	Selling Points
Older Worker	More experienced workers are very skilled in customer service and personal interactions. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Express your willingness to lead by example.• Highlight your willingness to learn.• Emphasize the value of your experience and adaptability.
Younger Worker	Younger workers have a more innate understanding of technology. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Express your willingness to help other workers that struggle with technology.• Highlight willingness to learn and new energy and ideas that come from younger workers
Over-Qualified	Be sure you only sell the skills the employer wants and those you can and are willing to use. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• If you are choosing to take a position below your skills or education, be sure you can explain why you are making this choice.• Emphasize your desire to stay long-term
Job Hopping	Determine what led to job hopping. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Express how you have overcome it and express your desire for finding a company in which you can become a long-term employee.
Gaps in Work History or Long-Term Unemployment	The biggest concern for an employer is how you maintained employability and marketability during your gap in employment. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sell what you accomplished during the gaps:<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Cared for a family-member– Worked with the Workforce Center to improve your professional skills– Researched companies, jobs, and the labor market– Learned new skills– Obtained education and/or training
Lack of Education, Training and Skills	If you have gaps in education, training or experience, express your ability to learn and give some examples of recent learning experiences. Highlight what value you do have and your related life experiences
Personal Issues (i.e. lack of childcare, transportation, or housing)	Locate community resources to help solve these issues (prior to the interview). The Workforce and Business Center Staff can offer resources.
Health or Emotional Issues	The better solution is to look for work that will not aggravate health issues and identify the best work environment for you to be successful. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• You only need to explain or disclose these to an employer if they will affect your work and you need an accommodation.
Criminal Background	Think like an advertiser – this is a marketing opportunity to demonstrate that you are the best fit for the position and the company. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Briefly explain what happened; keep it positive and don't dwell on the past• <i>See Letter of Explanation Handout.</i>